# University of Hawai'i Community Colleges: E-Learn

MARILYN WALSH

The E-Learn program is a collaboration of all seven UH community colleges to offer a distance-delivered Associate in Arts degree. The core mission of the UH Community Colleges is to put postsecondary education within the reach of every resident of the state. To provide that access, community colleges must be affordable, adaptable and flexible. Interim Dean of Instruction at Kaua'i CC, Helen Sina, who chaired the UHCC Distance Learning Committee during the development of the distance-delivered Associate Arts program noted: "Combining the resources of all seven institutions to offer an Associate in Arts degree by distance was a natural 'next step' for us." The challenge has been to maintain a delicate balance between meeting the needs and expectations of each college while creating a seamless, "one-institution" environment for the students – a task made more complex when seven separate community colleges are involved. In spite of these challenges, the University of Hawai'i Community Colleges are continuing to work toward these goals and are in the process of advancing into new territory that will bring benefits to the UHCC system, the colleges, and the students.

In Spring semester 2000, the UH Community Colleges began **E-learn**–a series of distance courses that were offered across the seven campus system. E-learn was designed so that students could work towards the Associate in Arts degree without having to attend traditional classroom-based courses. All seven UH Community Colleges collaborated by establishing a series of courses that allowed students to earn a degree through cable TV, Internet, and interactive television.

Students enrolled in E-learn choose one of the seven UH Community College campuses to be their degree-granting, or "home" campus–usually the one closest to the student home, as there may be times the student will need to contact or visit the campus. In addition to conferring the student's degree, the home campus provides academic and student support services, such as registration, academic advising, financial aid, and library and computer support for all courses taken (including those taken from another campus). Alvin Tagomori, Dean of Students at Maui CC, Bonnie Honma, Counselor at Kaua'i CC, and Hae Okimoto, Manager of Information Technology Services, Distributed Learning and User Services for the UH system took responsibility for developing a website that would facilitate communications with students.

The new, online AA degree is the same as the Associate in Arts Degree offered at any UHCC campus except that students can earn their degree with the help of distance technologies. Through E-Learn, traditional obstacles to attending college such as geographic location, work, physical and social conditions, personal circumstances, and family and community responsibilities, are reduced or even eliminated. Nevertheless, many students combine traditional campus-based courses with those that are available online. As Vinnie Linares, English Professor at Maui Community College, states: "The distance courses add to the convenience and flexibility required by our many non-traditional students who are faced with juggling the demands of family, job and study schedule." Linares has extensive experience in offering courses to Moloka'i and Lana'i using interactive

UHCC distance courses offered and enrollment for 2001

| | INTERNET | | CABLE | | ITV | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | # of courses | Enrollment | # of courses | Enrollment | # of courses | Enrollment |
| SPRING 2001 | 73 | 1162 | 24 | 580 | 19 | 197 |
| FALL 2001 | 186 | 1386 | 39 | 635 | 31 | 239 |

*No data collected for Summer 2001.

television. Although most of the courses offered via E-Learn are Internet-based courses, other technologies are also used. Cable TV courses, for example, use the state cable channel. In order to participate, students need to have access to cable TV and the cable channels listed in the class schedule. Interactive television (ITV)

courses require students to visit a designated campus at a specific time to participate in a closed-circuit television presentation. Increasingly computer technology is combined with television. For example, students enrolled in cable or interactive TV courses are sometimes required to use e-mail to communicate with their instructors. However, a number of courses are offered completely online and they provide students with greater flexibility and accessibility. In some instances, students are able to complete their degree exclusively using online resources. Some courses, however, may require campus visits during the semester, especially if they are enrolled in courses that make use of lab work and oral exams, such as chemistry, biology, and foreign languages,

All online courses demand a set of minimum requirements that include access to a computer with Internet and Web browser. Students are asked to take a short survey to help determine not only whether their computer skills are sufficient to take a distance-delivered course, but also to determine whether their learning style is conducive to online teaching methods. An online orientation is available to students, and, in the case of WebCT-based classes, all students are recommended to review the WebCT tutorial.

New programs have also been developed to support faculty professional development in the creation and maintenance of online courses. One program is TALENT (Teaching and Learning with Networked Technologies) which began in 1995 as an initiative of the Hawaii Education and Research Network (HERN). HERN was a three-year project awarded to the Department of Education and the University of Hawai'i to promote the use of the Internet in bringing about educational reform.

Other programs have also been implemented to support faculty during the regular calendar year and during the summers with campus-based training opportunities. Leeward CC, for instance, recently completed a 3-week long faculty development session on the use of student-centered learning in WebCT.

Informal meetings are also encouraged so that faculty can meet in interdisciplinary groups and share their experiences of teaching online. Individual initiative has been another important factor in online course development at the various UH community college campuses, especially when these individual efforts have received institutional support via funds devoted to the development of online courses.

The UHCC distance education committee has addressed and solved many of the challenges of coordinating the E-learn initiative and offering a distance associate of arts program. This group has also established some of the important groundwork for the new information system being implemented in July 2002. The committee has also addressed some of the issues involved in marketing the new program, and has helped with the creation of the E-learn website at http://www.hawaii.edu/uhcc.e-learn. Other challenges for the committee remain. For example, they need to develop ways to provide online science labs, provide testing options for classes, produce quality advising and counseling, and ensure that quality distance education experiences are in place for all students. In spite of these challenges, the faculty at the community colleges is aware of the importance of the changes that have taken place and of the need to expand access using online methods that address the needs of all students.

**Marilyn Walsh** is a public information officer in the Office of the Chancellor for the University of Hawai'i Community Colleges. She also served as a member of the marketing sub-committee for the UHCC E-learn program.